

# **Montana VR Council Meeting Minutes January 24-25, 2008**

# Vocational Rehabilitation Council

## January 24 – 25, 2008

### DDS Conference Room

### Helena, Montana

**Members present:** Jackie Colombe, Denise Corrao, Nina Cramer, Faith Dawson, Andrea Falcon, Dalayna Faight, Mary Hall, Sharla LaFountain, Wayne Nankivel, Ruth Straley, Dick Trerise, Claudette Vance, Lynn Winslow, Mavis Young Bear

**Members absent:** Ron Mills, Michelle Williamson, Dan Burke, Maureen Kenneally, Carol Lambert, Paul Pearson (unexcused), Christina Mattlin

**Staff and guests present:** Peggy Williams, Joe Mathews, Bob Jahner, Barb Varnum, Bev Berg, Barb Schiedermayer, Barb Kriskovich (Thursday)

#### Thursday, January 24

Ruth Straley called the meeting to order at 10:00. Introductions were made, new members (Mary Hall, Nina Cramer, and Lynn Winslow) were welcomed, and the Council reviewed the mission and vision statements. The October minutes were approved.

#### State and national update—Joe Mathews

On the federal side, we are entering an election year which means not much legislation passes. We are overdue for reauthorization of the federal Rehabilitation Act—but Congress probably won't get to it this year. Our federal funding will be similar to last year—maybe a very small cost of living increase. Discretionary programs such as independent living, assistive technology and inservice training received cuts. About half the states are in order of selection where not everyone can be served. Montana is not.

Our federal review will be the last week of April (April 28 – May 2). This is a new process, and Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) will send a team of 5 people. They will want to talk to the members of the Council. Montana will be compared to states with similar grant amounts. We've already noticed that with our comparison states, we are lower in number of transition students and higher with post-secondary training.

Transitions and veteran services are important areas for RSA. Montana has not noticed a large increase in veterans yet, but we expect to. We also expect to see more aging workers—baby boomers who want to stay in the workforce.

On the state side, we are in the early stages of planning for the 2009 Legislature. Budget requests are due in the Governor's office by early April. Last week, we sent out information on the Executive Planning Process to our "Friends of Rehab" distribution list. So far we are thinking about asking for more funding for extended employment, independent living, tuition increases, and maybe another transition counselor.

The VR All Staff meeting will be April 15-17. Bob Jahner and Joe Mathews will retire this year. Part of the All Staff will be devoted to explaining that the agency is strong and will continue to move forward under the new leadership.

#### Preparation for the federal teleconference

The Council discussed the federal teleconference in the afternoon. RSA is interested in hearing about strengths and weaknesses of the Montana VR program.

#### SILC (Statewide Independent Living Council) priorities—Mike Hermanson

Mike handed out copies of the Statewide Independent Living Council's (SILC) Governor's Report. He then discussed the seven issue clusters that the SILC is working on. These include (1) Medicaid issues (Medicaid buy-in and the Medicaid spend down base); (2) Independent Living Center funding issues (equalizing funding among centers, expand branch offices); (3) Education issues (disability education for all, youth programs, transitions); (4) Personal care services issues (living wage, insurance, training); (5) Housing issues; (6) Transportation issues (local transportation advisory committees); (7) "Nothing about us without us" (consumer input, "money follows the person"). If anyone is interested in participating on one of the taskforces, they can contact Mike.

#### Medicaid Infrastructure Grant—Barbara Kriskovich

Barb talked about the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG). The purpose of this grant is to allow Montana to explore the possibility of a Medicaid buy-in program. Medicaid buy-in allows people with disabilities who are working to purchase Medicaid insurance. If the state decides to do this, it will first need to be approved by the Legislature. Thirty nine other states have Medicaid buy-in programs, and they are not all the same. The number of participants in a state varies from 15 in Wyoming to 32,000 in Minnesota. Montana has the fourth highest work ethic among SSI (Supplemental Security Income) and SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance) recipients.

The Medicaid Infrastructure Grant is funding other activities also. These include holding an empowerment conference for Native Americans with disabilities and surveying people with disabilities and employers to see what barriers to employment they encounter. They have conducted benefits planning/work incentive workshops to teach planners what happens to SSI and SSDI benefits when consumers go to work. SSI and SSDI both have income limits. The MIG grant is also developing a business leadership network.

#### Teleconference with RSA—David Wachter

David Wachter, Montana's liaison with RSA, conducted the teleconference, and his notes are included as Appendix A

#### Miscellaneous program areas—Barb Varum

Barb talked about a number of administrative areas in VR. The state plan describes the administration of the VR program. It is composed of both a preprint and a narrative. It describes the goals of the program (our strategic plan). VR updates the state plan every year.

The annual public hearing for VR and Independent Living (IL) will be March 5 at 3:00. It will be conducted by MetNet, the state's video conferencing system. The hearing will be broadcast, and people may participate, at eight locations across Montana. The hearing allows people to talk about how to improve VR and IL services. Barb will send out more information in about a week.

The Governor's report was sent out earlier. We were hoping to have a representative from the Governor's office to discuss the report at our meeting, but she had a family emergency.

Barb is the liaison with the 6 Native American vocational rehabilitation programs, called Section 121s because they are authorized under Section 121 of the Rehabilitation Act. The Section 121s are funded directly by the federal government, so they are not a part of Montana VR. However, Montana VR does offer technical assistance, keeps the Tribes informed on policy changes, and invites the Tribal staff to training events. Montana VR and the Section 121s do have cooperative agreements, and Mavis suggested that the cooperative agreements should run during the grant period (5 years) rather than having them re-signed every year.

The consumer satisfaction survey is a function of the VR Council, and Barb coordinates it. All consumers who received services are surveyed when their cases close. We have a 22% response rate for this mail survey. We will have the 2007 results at the April Council meeting. Faith suggested that the "Making the Grade" poster at the Missoula office should be more prominently displayed on the office door and should be in color. Barb will follow up with the office. Barb did a 5 year comparison with the consumer satisfaction survey, and she found that the results were consistent over the years.

Ticket to Work is a program that allows Social Security recipients to use any employment network to receive services to help them return to work. There are five Montana employment networks, and VR is the one that almost everyone chooses. This is because VR will serve anyone with a disability, while other employment networks may choose the people they serve. The employment networks are reimbursed for their costs only after the consumer goes to work at a certain income level.

#### Blind and Low Vision services—Bev Berg

Bev talked about staffing in the Blind and Low Vision (BLV) program. Because of the difficulty in recruiting instructional staff (rehabilitation teachers and orientation and mobility specialists), BLV now has three trainees who are taking classes to become fully certified staff.

BLV has 4 programs:

- Vocational program—This is the VR program that helps people who are blind get jobs
- Older Blind—This program is for people with visual disabilities who are over 55. With the aging population, BLV is having a hard time meeting the needs of all the consumers.
- Business Enterprise Program—This program helps people with visual difficulties become self employed with vending routes or cafeterias on state and federal properties. Currently four vendors are employed: Missoula vending route, Helena vending route, Helena cafeteria, and Billings vending route.
- Visual Medical—This program pays for medical costs for people of any age who are about to lose their sight. The program is just about out of money for the year.

#### Field Services update—Bob Jahner

Bob talked about his recent work involving veterans. The VR local offices have good relationships with the veteran's workers. Although we have not noticed a large increase in the number of veterans served, we anticipate serving more veterans due to post traumatic stress disorder and cognitive disabilities.

Bob is still working with Faith and Dan on describing who is eligible for graduate school paid for by VR.

Bob talked about some of our “due process” actions recently. Due process refers to the procedures the agency and a consumer use to resolve differences. First, attempts are made with the counselor to come to an agreement. The Client Assistance Program may get involved. The consumer may request an administrative review which is done by the regional administrator. If the consumer is still not satisfied, he may request a hearing by a fair hearings officer. Recent due process actions include a consumer who wanted VR to pay for bills that he incurred without the bills being authorized by VR. The hearings officer ruled in favor of the agency. Another case the agency is working with involves a high school student who has a learning disability, but the school says that under their new definition, the student does not have a disability. This type of scenario may crop up again in the future, because of the new rules that schools operate under.

Bob mentioned the agency turnover---not only are he and Joe retiring, but in the near future some field management staff may also retire. The values of the agency will continue.

### **Friday, October 12**

#### **Committee reports**

Committee reports are included as appendices B, C, and D

#### **Transitions—Barb Schiedermayer**

Barb talked about her first week of having office hours at the three Missoula high schools. She is learning the schools lingo for people with disabilities and how the schools serve people with disabilities. She was surprised how many people were at the table for IEP (Individual Education Plan) meetings, and how sometimes the other professionals talk about the student rather than to the student.

Barb reported on how VR, Office of Public Instruction, and Montana Youth Leadership Forum are working together as Montana Youth Transitions and setting up a website for students, parents, and professionals.

#### **Program evaluation and planning—Peggy Williams**

Peggy went over the one-page handout “Stats at a Glance”. Although the total number of consumers served is down, the number of rehabilitations (people who went to work) is up. In 2007, 912 people went to work because of VR services. The total annual earnings of those people are \$14.4 million, and their average hourly wage was \$10.20. Forty nine percent of the consumers had a mental disability, 41 percent had a physical disability, and 10 percent had a sensory disability.

The strategic plan consists of the goals of the VR program for the next few years. These goals are also included in the VR state plan. Every quarter, VR management and the VR Council review the progress on the strategic plan. The plan has 8 goals, and activities have occurred under each of the goals. Attachment E is the strategic plan evaluation.

### National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC)

NCSRC is a newly formed organization of state rehabilitation councils. They hold monthly teleconferences and have come up with a mission, vision, core values and by-laws. These were reviewed by the VR Council. NCSRC asked each state rehabilitation council to adopt a resolution supporting the organization. After discussing the resolution, the Montana VR Council decided not to adopt the resolution at this time. Concerns included not knowing if the organization would be adversarial towards VR agencies (Montana has an excellent relationship between the VR program and the Council), the newness of the organization, not knowing what the financial commitment would entail, and the uncertainty of where the organization would head. We may want to reconsider this in a year or two after we see what the organization does. Peggy stated that we could still participate in the teleconferences and other activities if we were not members—but we would not be able to vote.

### Other new business

Dick suggested that the Council draft a statement of support for the future of the VR program to be presented at the All Staff meeting. Part of the All Staff meeting will discuss how the agency will strongly continue on with the same values after Joe and Bob retire this year.

Ruth moved to develop a statement of operational values that we promote to be delivered at the All Staff meeting. In addition, Dick or his designee would present the statement at the meeting. The motion passed.

### Election of officers

Dick Trerise was elected chair and Jackie Colombe was elected vice-chair.

### Agenda items for next meeting

The next meeting will be April 30 – May 1 in Helena. On May 1, we will meet jointly with the SILC (Statewide Independent Living Council) and also with RSA.

Agenda items for our business meeting include:

Presentation of Jackie's PR video

Transitions update by Barb Schiedermayer

Update on All Staff, staff turnover

Ellen Swaney?--Barb will contact

Federal monitoring

**Appendix A**  
**Teleconference with RSA**  
**January 24, 2008**  
**(Notes from David Wachter)**

**Attending: Council: Denise Corrao, Miles City, Mavis Young Bear, Fort Belknap, Andrea Falcon, Kalispell, , Wayne Nankivel, Helena, Ruth Straley, Helena, Dick Treise, Helena, Claudette Vance, Kalispell, Jacqueline, Colombe –Basin, Faith Dawson, Missoula, Dalayna Faught, Missoula, Sharla LaFountanin, Great Falls, Nina Cramer, Mary Hall, Lynn Winslow**

Attending: VR Staff and others

Joe Mathews, Peggy Williams, Bob Jahner, Beverly Berg, Barb Varnum, Marylyn Daumiller,

Dave Wachter called the Montana Vocational Rehabilitation Council (Council) at 1:30 MTS on January 24, 2008. The Council was having a previously scheduled meeting

**The Council Chair began the teleconference with a general comment that went as follows:**  
Strengths:

The VR council is fully constituted, diverse, committed and comfortable with each other. It is a very well run council. The MVR staff has many senior managers who have years of experience who work well as a team, providing Montana an excellent program that serves the disabled population very well. Montana is a small town and we in the disability community know each other and feel positive about how MVR is managed.

Another positive about the program is how efficient they are with the limited budget that is available to them.

Issues:

Montana is a very large state, stretching 800 miles from corner to corner with most of the citizens living in small towns. Because of the size and sparse population, Montana is more than a rural state it is a frontier state, which in itself creates both transportation and communication problems. The problems with transportation is the lack of public transportation and the long distances between those who need services and where the services can be obtained, which often require many hours of driving.

A Council member identified the large geographical size and the relatively small population of the state as unique barrier for people with disabilities in Montana. The size and low population causes problems because it can be very difficult to know all of the services that are available and where those services can be obtained. It has only been recently and still not for everyone that the internet, cell phones and cable/satellite TV are becoming available outside of the larger cities.

A Council member who has a disability was very upset because the Social Security Administration rejected her request for assistance. She was very concerned about her future until she began receiving services at MVR. With the help of her MVR counselor she was able to obtain therapy and complete her post secondary education. She is now active on the Council and working part time, but because she lives over twenty miles from town and does not drive, she can only work when she is able to obtain a ride from neighbors and friends, which is good, but not predictable like being able to drive on your own car or having access to public. The Council member also brought up the problems caused by Montana's extreme weather conditions, which

consist of frequent snowstorms and temperatures that often hover around zero degrees creating another barrier to getting to a job.

Another Council member stated the Council is very accepting of the Native American community and that it is a pleasure to be on the Council. In the summer the Council comes to the Fort Belknap to get to know the people and understand the culture of the Native American. This trips help the Council understand what the over all issues are and how the problems are different for a Native American with a significant disability when he or she is living on a reservation.

Another member shared that the Native American's are the largest minority group in Montana, which is 7% of the population. The Council works hard to build bridges with the Indian populations both on the reservations and with those who live in the cities. RSA asked what percentage of Native Americans are living in the cities and it indicated that 45% of the Native Americans in Montana live in the cities, mostly Billings and Great Falls.

One of the Council members has requested a meeting with RSA in person when the team arrives in late April. This person has a hearing impairment and stated she would feel more involved in the monitoring process if she had some time when she could more clearly communicate what she feels are the strengths and needs of MVR.

RSA asked how the Council goes about reviewing and adding input to the State Plan. MVR staff and the SRC Chair shared this answer by first stating the process was on-going all of the time but in cycles with certain goals towards developing the plan to be completed before a new cycle began. For the past few years MVR has incorporated the State Plan with an annual Strategic Planning session led by a person skilled in group facilitation and strategic planning. This process includes video conferencing with 8 to 10 sites and is part of the public hearings process. Along with the facilitator, Joe, the SRC chair and the SILC chair run the strategic planning sessions.

The SRC chair added that MVR keeps the SRC in the loop with standing reports available each time the Council meets. "These reports are comprehensive and useful in our role to monitor the progress on goals in the State Plan. We use some of this information in our annual report to the Governor. We have a comprehensive, on going structured process."

One of the Council members added that the group has guests at the meetings on a regular basis from community-based programs, state agencies or organizations that advocate for people with various disabilities. The Council finds these presentations very useful in understanding what is available for people with disabilities and it helps identify what is needed for people who are unserved or underserved.

The SRC chair added that the Council wrote the Mission and Vision for the Council and at every meeting the Council reviews it to remind themselves what the purpose of the SRC is and its role in Montana with the disability community and MVR.

RSA asked if the Council was involved in the transitioning youth programs. The SRC Chair shared that he worked with transitioning youth when he was with the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) and that the Council has a sub-group dedicated to transitioning youth with a focus on how to provide outreach and improve the program. This issue has obtained the support of the Governor and now the Montana government funds a transitioning youth counselor.



The MVR Administrator stated he was very excited about the data comparing MVR with states that were nearby, had similar budgets or were just different from Montana and he has been encouraging his staff and the SRC to look at the data. RSA said that if Montana would like to request some “data mining” and answer some questions they may have about how they are doing, they should forward their questions to Dave Wachter, the liaison.

One last comment from one of the Council members was a statement that the technical assistance needs are significant in Montana

The CAP chair asked if the Monitoring team will be meeting with the CAP. RSA indicated they want to meet with CAP and it will be included in the agenda as the monitoring process continues.

This concluded the meeting. RSA will forward these minutes to those in attendance for approval and or corrections.

Respectfully,  
Dave Wachter  
David.Wachter@ed.gov

**Appendix B**  
**Transitions Committee**  
**January 25, 2008**

Members present: Dick Trerise, Faith Dawson, Barbara Scheidermayer, Bob Jahner, Sharla LaFountain, Mary Hall

Bob Jahner provided a summary of the Governor's task force work over the previous quarter. There was little new to report other than the work of involving more consumer participation and the formation of a number of work groups to report back to the main task force in the February 20 meeting.

Dick provided a report on the initial longitudinal one-year-out survey on Special Education graduates. He detailed the implications of the survey returns and guided the subcommittee on how to interpret the results.

Barb S and Faith D discussed her work including the work they are doing in folding in some of Faith's mentor concepts into the anticipated website. We used this session to iron out some of the ideas regarding how to represent the mentors and their offerings on the website. We also took some time to explore who the partners were for which website proposal. Dick indicated that he was not made directly aware that OPI was a partner and we took a minute to close that communications gap.

We discussed at length the progress or lack of progress in getting a representative from OCHE to meet with the Council and talk about the how we could more standardize the intake procedures and requirements for the education systems Disability Student Services. To this end Dick T offered a very interesting summary of some of the history of the development of student services organizations for students with Disabilities. He pointed out that the University of Montana Missoula student service organization came to be as the result of the proceeds of a lawsuit and consequently that organization is larger and receives more funding than is received by like organizations in the system. This disparity in history and support to some degree may account for the difficulty in standardization. There is of course not the single cause. There was some discussion on how to best approach the difficulty of achieving standardization or at least predictability. We also talked about the Council's proper role in addressing the problem. Bob Jahner suggested that if there were something we could do that would be positive and in keeping with our role, we might consider in some way facilitating the development of a model of transition and intake into programs of higher education that the various University student/disability programs could adopt as a standard toward which to strive. This approach would avoid the inappropriate compliance kind of role that the Council needs to avoid. The presence of a consensus model would set up a possible common core of considerations that could draw conversation, consensus and resource. The group discussed the merits and drawbacks of the idea of a model and in general felt this might be the way to proceed.

The group chose Dick T as our reporter.

**Appendix C**  
**Public Awareness Committee**  
**January 25, 2008**

1. PSA

Jackie is working with Montana Tech developing a 60 second PSA which can be reduced to 30 seconds. Jackie will contact Joe Murphy, Butte Vocational Rehabilitation regional manager. The purpose of the PSA is to raise awareness of VR for Butte. The PSA will be done so that it can be modified for other offices.

2. Business Recognition Pilot Program

We are developing the wording for certificates. We must also develop press releases to send out to local papers. Six nominations will be tested, and they should be sent to Peggy.

3. PR video

Peggy is making a copy for Mike Hermanson for disability education.

**Appendix D**  
**Native American Committee Meeting**  
**January 25, 2008**

Members: *Mavis Young Bear, Jackie Colombe, Andrea Falcon, Barbara Varnum*

Absent: *Michelle Williamson, Ron Mills*

Jennifer Perez Cole, Indian Affairs Coordinator for the Governor, sent out comments and recommendations from the October meeting that the Governor held for all Tribal members that sit on state boards and councils. Jennifer is requesting that all councils review the document and determine how best each council can incorporate the recommendations, when appropriate. She would like a response by March 21<sup>st</sup>.

None of the members at today's meeting attended the meeting in October. Michelle Williamson did attend, and Barbara will contact her to get further information. The group will review the document, and send possible recommendations to Barbara who will then forward on the recommendations. Some of the recommendations that we talked about today are:

- Recommend that the Independent Living Centers (ILC) either a) provide more outreach to the reservations, or b) provide funding to the Tribe so that they can hire an individual to provide these services on the Reservations.
- Educate the Governor's office regarding the make-up of the MVR Council
- Recommend that all councils and boards are posted in one place on the internet, and that their minutes be posted as well. This is response to the recommendation that councils increase their relationships across boards/councils.

Barbara requests that the NA Committee send their comments to her by March 15, 2008. Barbara will send out feed back from Michelle regarding her attendance at the October meeting.

The group reviewed the 121 Fact Sheet that Barbara developed. This will be sent to all MVR counselors and to the Urban Indian Centers in the state. The Fact Sheet has eligibility requirements and area served for each 121 Project. Barbara still needs to get further information, and will need to get approval from all of the 121s before this is sent out.

The annual TBI Native American conference in Billings will not be held this year, as the grant ended. Barbara talked to Ian Elliot/ MSU-Billings TBI Project Coordinator: he stated that there will be a Brain Injury Conference in Billings April 12 & 13. While this conference will not be specific to Native American issues, Ian stated that he is trying to coordinate to have Native American programs represented at the conference.

The committee will gather statistics on the Urban Indian population in Montana. We would like to gather this information by April so that it can be shared with Rehabilitation Services Administration personnel when they are in Montana.

Barbara will attend the Consortium of Native American Administrators (CANAR) conference in Niagara Falls June 21-23. Mavis reports that the annual CANAR conference will be held this

fall in Phoenix, AZ. If funds are available, Mavis recommended that the Havre MVR counselor be allowed to attend, as she is currently serving three Reservations.

The council reviewed June Hermanson/ MYLF Project Director, email regarding MYLF's outreach to the reservations. Mavis stated that she recently received a packet regarding this summer's MYLF conference.

Barbara reports that April Zimmerer—121 Project Director of the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes has agreed to hold the summer MVR council meeting in Pablo. We have not yet scheduled the dates, but it will be held sometime in July.

Mavis would like the committee to develop a "fact sheet" (on the line of the Governor's report) of all of the 121 Projects in Montana. We will further discuss this at the next meeting.

**Appendix E**  
**Strategic Plan Evaluation**  
**January 25, 2008**

# Montana VR Strategic Plan

*Evaluation--January 2008*

## **1. Successfully assist people with disabilities to achieve their employment goals.**

- Continue to meet the standards and indicators, our federal report card.

Central: Montana VR met all the federal standards and indicators for FY 2007.

- Continue achieving high consumer satisfaction feedback by meeting or exceeding 85% on consumer survey question #10, "In an overall general sense, how satisfied are you with the services you received?"

Central: The VR numbers have not yet been calculated, but the IL question, "I am satisfied with the services from IL", had an 86.8% positive response rate.

- Refine our methods to identify unserved and underserved populations and how to serve them. Evaluate methods over the next three years on developing ways to measure unserved and underserved.

- Make available a list of qualified benefits planners.

Billings: We have discussed the availability of benefits planners. A list for distribution is being created.

Butte: A list of qualified benefits planners has been made available to all counselors.

Great Falls: We have a list of statewide benefits planners that are available to our customers. We routinely provide printed literature on services available through the Montana Center on Disabilities and North Central Independent Living Services.

Missoula: Flo Kiewel with Summit ILC in the Flathead is a qualified benefits planner. New staff in the Missoula and Hamilton offices of Summit will be trained in the next few months. Deb Conwell of the WORC Center is self trained and has worked closely with local Social Security staff for several years.

- Offer referral to benefit planners (CWICs) at intake to new SSI and SSDI clients.

Butte: All counselors have begun offering benefits planning to referred or active Social Security recipients.

Great Falls: Information on benefit planning services available to Social Security recipients is provided at weekly MVR informational meetings. The general information which is provided at our group meetings is followed up with more detailed information at the initial meeting with the counselor.

Missoula: In Missoula and Mineral counties, we are encouraging case managers of consumers in the mental health system to facilitate benefits analysis prior to referral to VR.

- Increase the percentage of rehabilitated consumers who have health insurance at closure. The 2006 percentage of rehabs with health insurance through their employment was 26.1%. The 2006 percentage of rehabs with any kind of health insurance (including Medicaid and Medicare) was 69.5%.

Central: In 2007, 239 out of 912 (26.2%) rehabs had insurance through their employer. The 2007 percentage of rehabs with any kind of health insurance (including Medicaid and Medicare) was 70.9% (647 out of 912).

- Have CRP liaisons find out from placement specialists what the need, availability, and use of soft skills training is in their region. Also have the workforce liaisons investigate this.

Butte: Soft skills trainers have been identified in the region, and counselors have been given information regarding soft skills in each office.

Great Falls: We gathered information from local One Stop Centers on training availability. We receive monthly fliers and e-mail distributions regarding the various soft skills training available. Our counselor supervisor is surveying regional CRPs regarding this service need.

Missoula: This is in progress.

- Train consumers in transportation options by asking the independent living centers to present travel training at each regional office every two years.

Great Falls: The regional administrator regularly participates in Transportation Advisory Council meetings. Information obtained is brought back to regional staff.

- Provide more access regarding new and emerging technologies by providing training at statewide events such as the annual All Staff meeting. Sources of training could be PLUK and the Rural Institute.

BLV: BLV hired an assistive technology specialist this fall. Paul Suptic is pursuing training on the adaptive software and hardware for people with visual impairments. He will attend two workshops by Freedom Scientific in January. After this training, he will schedule a workshop for hands-on JAWS training for consumers and BLV staff. He will invite MonTech and MSDB staff as well.

Central: Brigitte Winfield, Bob Jahner, and Barb Varnum will meet with Kathy Laurin from MonTech on January 28 to discuss expanded training and access to new and emerging technologies.

## **2. Assure that consistent, high quality transition services are made available statewide**

- Continue identifying and communicating with students with disabilities in schools.

Billings: We have distributed posters to schools as we have had contact with counselors, teachers and administrators. Some presentations have been given to individual high school classes. The most recent was to the high school in Huntley.

Great Falls: All counselors in the Great Falls region are actively involved in transition activities.

Missoula: Staff participate in transition fairs (parents, teachers and students) and attend IEPs either in person or by phone.

Central: The Legislature approved funding for a transitions counselor, and that position has been hired in Missoula. On January 7, a web conference was held: "Montana VR—Navigating the Transition from School to Work". VR is also helping sponsor a transitions conference in September in Great Falls: "Transition to What?" Five VR staff will attend training in January 2008 on "Facilitating Successful Transitions for Youth and Young Adults with Brain Injury".

- Continue updating and maintaining VR liaisons with schools and the school contact list for transitions.

Billings: This has been done.



Great Falls: The list of liaison contacts in our region has been updated. This list, which is on our website, accurately reflects the counselors responsible for individual schools.

Missoula: This has been done.

- Continue relationships with OPI, PLUK, and MYLF.

Billings: A Billings counselor participated in the MYLF summer event.

Butte: Some counselors have participated in MYLF.

Great Falls: Some counselors have participated in MYLF.

Missoula: A Missoula counselor participated in MYLF. A Missoula counselor serves on the MYLF advisory board and our transitions counselor is very involved with all players in the field of transitions (Governor's Transitions Committee, MYLF, Rural Institute, Missoula high schools).

- Continue to explore video conferencing for transition services.

Billings: We are continuing to explore this in the Billings region. We have found that the schools have lower access to technology than was originally thought.

Great Falls: This is a work in progress. We do have video conferencing capabilities in the Great Falls office which are used to communicate with our customers who are deaf. Two different devices are available. There have been issues with compatibility of service which we are attempting to resolve.

Missoula: We attempted to participate in an IEP in Eureka via video but the school system was not operating correctly. Staff in the Kalispell office will continue to explore the use of video equipment.

- Determine how many high school students we are serving, not serving, and who and where they are.

Great Falls: When counselors visit their individual schools, they provide information on program eligibility criteria. This education assists in identifying potentially eligible transitioning students who have not been considered for VR services.

- Develop a public relation (PR) plan to reach students with disabilities, parents, school staff, and community agencies on transition services.

Billings: We are targeting each school and have begun by using posters and training.

Butte: Meetings have been held with all schools. Posters are being developed for distribution to schools as well as businesses.

Missoula: In January the transitions counselor will begin having regular hours in each of the three public high schools in Missoula and possibly in the alternative high school. Counselors in the Kalispell office and Hamilton office continue to attend IEPs. Missoula counselors and regional administrator attend IEPs when possible.

- Invite a school representative to discuss transitions in each region.

Great Falls: Great Falls school district personnel from both Great Falls HS and CM Russell HS have been in our office during December to discuss current transition policies and procedures with our designated liaisons. Our counselor supervisor has also been part of those discussions.

Missoula: The transition counselor will conduct a meeting (preferring to call it a "retreat") with all high school staff involved in transitions.

- Explore transition programs in other states.

Missoula: The transitions counselor has attended national meetings and has met with leaders in the transitions effort. The Rural Institute staff keep VR counselors informed about transitions trainings and news.

- Hire a transition counselor/program officer to directly serve consumers and to develop transition practices. Determine if transition referrals increase.

Missoula: The Legislature appropriated funding for a transitions counselor which was hired for the Missoula region. She is working with the VR data person to determine the impact of this position on referrals to the VR program.

- Create a strategy for improved access in schools.

Great Falls: At regional staff meetings, we have explored ways to improve our referral process. Our counselor in Havre is working with schools along the Highline to improve the way that students are transitioned to VR services.

- Develop urban and rural models of transition services.

- Serve 20 high school students through MYLF.

Great Falls: Our staff has made a concerted effort to ensure that MYLF information and application forms are available for interested students and school personnel. These efforts should pay off with additional participation.

- Coordinate annually with disability services offices at university level (regional level).

Billings: We coordinate regularly with the disability services offices at MSU-Billings and the schools in Miles City and Glendive. Usually this coordination is on a per student basis as issues arise.

Butte: Butte counselors meet regularly with Disability Services representatives at the various universities in the region.

Great Falls: We coordinate regularly with Disability Service offices at MSU College of Technology, the University of Great Falls, and MSU Northern. This past year, we attended the annual meeting of disability services coordinators which was held in Great Falls.

Missoula: This is done on a case by case basis. There will be a meeting with disability services to discuss how the financial aid level is determined. We met with University of Montana staff in the business office, financial aid, student services, career services, and medical withdrawal offices. There has been confusion with financial aid and business offices and the other areas were more for awareness of their resources for students. A counselor with experience working in the student services area of a community college will be our UM liaison and will work with UM to develop better contact strategies.

### **3. Build awareness and understanding of VR services**

- Educate legislators, consumers, and the general public on VR services by sending out quarterly updates through the Friends of Rehab email list.

Central: VR sent the following items to its “Friends of Rehab” mailing list: (1) update on the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (August 17, 2007); (2) link to web page of VR

state plan and IL state plan (October 17, 2007); (3) copy of the VR Council Governor's Report (January 4, 2008).

- Explore the potential of TV/radio ads, maybe collaborating with MTAP.

Butte: We have been exploring the possibility of having a senior or graduate student at Montana Tech develop a public relations campaign for the region. We are waiting for the program director to contact us.

- Invite at least one business in each region to do a presentation at a staff meeting.

Billings: Dwight Vigness, Human Resources Director of Yellowstone County spoke to the office on November 8. Issues covered included: use of handicapped preference, jobs available through counties, jobs that are hard to fill and ones that have more qualified applicants.

Butte: We met with the director of Kids Management Authority to discuss their program and to determine how we can help the underserved kids who are helped by that organization.

Great Falls: We have a close working relationship with Cable Technologies Inc. This company has employed many VR customers. The individuals that have gone to work with this company include many people with varying disabilities. We currently have four customers who are deaf and working as assembly technicians. The president of this company and the human resources director have been in our office to discuss employment opportunities with their company. Our staff have toured their facility.

- Expand career fair activity in more communities (as an employer and consumer resource).

Billings: We participate in almost every job and health fair. For example, we participated in the health fair in Glendive, the job fair in Miles City, the Jobs Jamboree/fair in Billings, the Senior Health Fair in Billings, etc.

Butte: We participate in all career fairs, health fairs, and job fairs.

Great Falls: We are currently looking for ways to increase our participation in career fairs across our region. During the month of October we did take part in an employer fair in Lewistown. This event was jointly sponsored by the Lewistown Chamber of Commerce and the HRDC.

Missoula: Both the Kalispell and Missoula offices have participated in the past and anticipate doing so again this year. A career fair jointly sponsored by the Missoula and Hamilton JSECs (Job Service Employer Councils) will be held at the Florence-Carlton school in March. The regional administrator continues to serve on the Missoula JSEC.

#### **4. Develop opportunities for better jobs and on-the-job supports for people who are working.**

- Inventory methods of supporting consumers on the job following supported employment closures.
- Expand resources for Extended Employment program by asking the Legislature for more funding.
- Study and explore post-BA eligibility and educational opportunities.

- Invite the National Business Network to present at the 2008 All Staff meeting.

Missoula: Consider the WorkSource Wisconsin program also

Central: We discussed an invitation to the national Business Network to present at the 2008 All Staff, and we decided against it as Montana does not have the large national employers typical of partnerships with the network. Brigitte is seeking a speaker to present on “What are employers really looking for and how can we fill the need?”

## **5.Enhance VR services specifically for people with mental illness, brain injuries, and learning disorders**

- Require each region have a focus group on mental health issues.

Billings: This is in the planning stage.

Butte: We will invite mental health consumers to explain their needs and tell their stories at our focus forum.

Great Falls: We are working with our mental health center liaison to plan this year’s focus group discussion.

Missoula: This is in the planning stage.

- Get baseline information on how we serve consumers with mental illness, brain injuries and learning disorders: #26s; wage at closure; service rate, geographic areas. Develop a strategy to address areas of weakness.

- Encourage one counselor from each region to attend the NAMI (National Association of Mentally Ill) conference each year to help develop “pockets of expertise” within the VR staff.

Billings: We have pocket of expertise counselors participating in the NAMI group and the mental health advisory council.

Butte: A counselor did attend the conference.

Great Falls: We have a designated mental health expert, but that person was unable to attend this year’s conference. However, two other staff did attend the conference, and they shared information with other Great Falls staff.

Missoula: Four staff attended this conference and reported back to other counselors.

Central: VR continues to provide pockets of expertise with pertinent mental health training. In October, fourteen VR staff from across the state attended the 2007 Montana conference on mental illness, “The Journey of Recovery”.

- Focus one state training event (All Staff or MAR) in 2008 on mental health issues. Find models and bring in representatives from successful programs.

Central: Several speakers presented on the topic of mental health at the 2007 Montana Association for Rehabilitation conference and mental health issues will continue to be addressed at 2008 training events.

## **6.Collaborate with other appropriate agencies and 121s to enhance outcomes for consumers.**

- Write a letter to the DPHHS director stating how our needs assessment again identified transportation as one of the highest needs our consumers mentioned.

- Stay informed with what is going on with independent living and Montana Transportation Partnerships regarding transportation.

Missoula: We recently met with Summit Independent Living staff to discuss services and common issues, including transportation.

- Work with 121 projects to determine needs and alignment with VR. Barb will contact the 121s and ask for input regarding the needs on their respective Reservations.

Billings: We are actively advising and coordinating with the Northern Cheyenne 121.

Great Falls: We work with all the 121 Projects. The Blackfeet Manpower Program has recently been certified as the first One Stop Center on a Reservation. We have an excellent working relationship with this center and are seeking ways to increase services that are available to our joint customers.

Missoula: The counselor serving the Flathead Reservation recently met with staff of the tribal VR program to discuss how both programs can work together more effectively.

- Maintain joint training with 121 projects. Barb will continue to notify the 121 projects about training opportunities such as All Staff, MAR conference, CTAT training opportunities, etc. Barb will send the 121 projects any updated information on the MVR counselor manual.

Central: Barb sends the 121s information regarding training opportunities on a regular basis (National Center for the Dissemination of Disability, CTAT training on TBI employment, Pathfinder Associates training on ethics, and the MAR conference. She sent the 121s the MVR policy changes on due process, MVR fee schedule, assessment and graduate training, and case filing procedures on 10/30/07.

- Continue good relationships with all the 121s. Barb will visit each Reservation with a 121 project when invited.

Central: This fall, Barb visited Salish Kootenai and Northern Cheyenne.

- Provide technical assistance to the 121s when requested.

- Continue participation on federal benefits workshops on Reservations. Barb will attend at least two federal benefits workshops per year on Reservations.

Great Falls: We also have made presentations at several federal benefits workshops.

Central: Barb, Scott Tanner and Doug Robinson attended the Browning disability conference in October. Barb and Kathy Ryan attended the Fort Belknap federal benefits workshop in September.

- Inform disability groups about progress being made on Medicaid Infrastructure Grant.

Central: An update on the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant was sent to “Friends of Rehab” on August 17, 2007. Barbara Kriskovich, grant director, will update the VR Council at its January meeting. This is also one of Independent Living’s focus areas from their 2007 symposium.

- Support inclusion of Medicaid Buy-In in the EPP process.

- Develop or improve the Community Rehab Program (CRP). Barb will convene the CRP liaison group via telephone conference call four times per year to discuss CRP issues and

possible solutions. Barb will contact the CRPs regarding what their needs for improvement are in FY 2008.

- Identify and encourage additional CRP participation. The MVR/CRP rates committee will have at least two CRP representatives that serve on the committee. Barb will contact at least two mental health facilities in FY 2008 regarding their interest in becoming a provider for MVR.

Central: Three CRP liaison conference calls have been held so far in SFY 2008: July, September, and October.

- Participate in employer associations such as Workforce Centers, Community Management Teams, and One-Stops.

Billings: We are part of a One Stop Center, and the Billings VR regional administrator is currently manager of the center. A counselor in Miles City is currently the chairperson of the Southeastern Montana CMT in Miles City.

Butte: All offices are participating with their local CMTs—some on a monthly basis, but most on a quarterly basis.

Great Falls: We have identified liaison responsibilities for all of the One Stop centers located in our region. The regional administrator or the designated counselor regularly attends CMT meetings and sponsored activities.

Missoula: VR is represented on the Missoula, Bitterroot and Flathead CMTs.

- Establish a liaison with Department of Corrections and become familiar with their programs related to disability.

Butte: We are in constant contact with various programs related to the Department of Corrections such as: START on the Warm Springs campus; WATCH and CONNECTIONS on the Warm Springs campus; NEXIS in Lewistown; the Men and Women's Center in Butte and Helena.

- Continue inter-agency cooperation with OPI, Higher Education, and other agencies.

Central: We have cooperative agreements with many of these agencies.

- Meet with Job Service to understand their new role.

Great Falls: We have an excellent working relationship with our Great Falls Workforce Center. Recently we met with their new disability navigator to discuss services which are being provided. We will continue to coordinate services so that more customers can have access to the array of services provided by both agencies.

Missoula: The Missoula regional administrator met with Missoula Job Service staff and met their new regional manager. The Job Service disability navigator will attend a VR staff meeting in February.

- Continue participation in local Mental Health advisory councils.

Billings: We have pocket of expertise counselors who participate in the NAMI group and the mental health advisory councils.

Missoula: Staff will attend LACs in Missoula, Kalispell, and Hamilton. The regional administrator attends Western Service Area Authority meetings.

- Invite other agencies (such as Job Service, Mental Health, DD, OPI) to present at VR Council meeting.



- Strengthen networking between VR and other agencies. In 2008, work with Mental Health and Job Service. In 2009, work with Veterans Administration and Brain Injury.

Billings: We are working on having a counselor work a portion of time out of a mental health location like the HUB.

Butte: We have assigned a counselor to be the principle resource person with respect to mental health issues.

Missoula: We met with the mental health vocational person and a representative of the PACT to discuss the referral process and case coordination.

- Arrange for workforce presentations describing living wage and benefits (what's hot and what's not) once a year in each region.

Great Falls: We have arranged for Job Service to make a presentation at our weekly staff meeting during the next quarter.

Missoula: Through the Missoula CMT, presentations on issues related to the economy, transportation, living wages, and growth are planned over the next four months.

## **7. Continue attention to in-service training and meeting CSPD qualifications.**

- Continue to provide in-service training to staff so they continue to be qualified.

Butte: We continue to encourage staff to participate in training, including the recent mental health training in Missoula.

Great Falls: Our staff continues to take advantage of in-service training opportunities as they arise. We have had counselors participate in several CTAT training sessions. Since we have several new counselors, they are all involved in formal Utah State masters level coursework. This is a significant commitment of staff time.

Central: We do an annual needs assessment each fall to determine the training needs of staff.

- Continue to require professional development plans for counselors.

Central: We do this and review them annually.

- Continue in-service on new counselor training and training to remain current on disability trends.

Central: MVR Futures developed a new counselor training guide.

- Develop specific training on VR public law and policy for counselors. (Bob J will do this at bi-district).

- Provide conflict and mediation training for MVR staff including mediation techniques when a counselor has to say no. Also provide training on how to deal with consumers who are in crisis.

- Provide staff with information on employment trends (demographics, labor market, interagency linkages and changes).

Billings: We circulate this information to staff on a regular basis.

Great Falls: Our office receives regular emails and distributions from the workforce centers identifying employment and labor market trends.

Missoula: Staff are invited to attend CMT events and this information is also shared at staff meetings.

Central: Staff have access to information, but may require reminders or best practices training.

- Continue good succession planning program and prepare for upcoming retirements of senior management.

Great Falls: We have several staff members participating in management training through the state's Professional Development Center. We also encourage staff to consider application for the Futures group. Two people in our office have taken part in the Futures group.

Central: We just began recruiting for the 7<sup>th</sup> year of MVR Futures. We continue to send staff to "Basics of Management" and the "Emerging Leaders" series

- Continue cultural awareness activities including having a VR Council meeting on a Reservation, sending a counselor to CANAR. Look at the needs of urban Native Americans who do not live on a reservation.

Central: The July VR Council meeting was held on the Blackfeet Reservation. Six staff recently attended cultural diversity training in Helena, and a counselor was scheduled to attend CANAR but was unable to due to medical reasons.

- Explore video conferencing for training.

- Develop a forum for sharing best practices among the counselors such as setting up a column in the newsletter.

Billings: We shared best practice information at our regional staff meeting on November 8, 2007.

Missoula: We are trying to discuss "hot topics" such as transportation, dental decisions, and new resources at a staff meeting and then have someone write up guidelines and put that information on our share drive.

## **8. Expand our staff recruitment effort**

- Analyze and determine optimal staffing needs considering job placement, transitions, travel, number of cases.

- Enhance recruitment through expanding internships through Futures, participating in career fairs and making contacts with universities regarding employment opportunities. (Brigitte)

Billings: We have consistently had interns from the rehabilitation counselor training program at MSU-Billings. Last semester, we had two masters degree students who received training and participated in assisting with service provision to a full range of client services.

Great Falls: We make annual presentations to classes at the University of Great Falls. These presentations provide information on the VR program and educate masters level students on opportunities for employment in the field of rehabilitation.

BLV: BLV filled the orientation and mobility specialist position in Butte with a trainee who started in January. She will take online courses, attend training at a blindness



rehabilitation center and begin training in a masters degree program in orientation and mobility.

Central: The Futures internship project should be completed by late spring/early summer. Dan Gray is initially making the MSU-Billings contact and then getting back to Brigitte.

- Provide information on VR/BLVS as a career to high school students.

Butte: We have participated in job fairs, youth fairs, and youth awareness days at local schools to bring the awareness of rehabilitation to the public.

- Recruit and hire a Deaf Coordinator in Great Falls.

Great Falls: Bob Ellesch started this job in January 2008!!

### **More investigation and resources needed (reviewed annually)**

- Make more time available between counselors and consumers.

Great Falls: Our staff is working hard to become more efficient in using our new case management system. We have made great strides in this area. The result of these efforts will be to increase the time available for counseling and one-on-one interaction with our customers.

- Provide more financial support for Business Enterprise Program.

BLV: MBEI was provided additional funding in October to assist with meeting past debts on salaries. BLVS is working with MBEI to provide additional assistance for purchase of more vending machines for federal properties on existing routes.

- Orient school administrators and guidance counselors regarding transitions and VR.

Billings: We work on this regularly. We participate in CSPD for schools in two regions. Billings, for example, is also providing training on services and transitions to schools—the most recent is training through Yellowstone Coop East which serves high schools in the eastern half of Yellowstone county.

Great Falls: This is an ongoing effort. All our counselors do regular education as they work on transition relationships with their individual schools.

- Develop a video on orientation for vocational goal development to help consumers understand their role. Watch the consumer satisfaction survey to monitor trends on concerns with goal development.

- Continue development of new materials for consumers. Find websites to help consumers focus on the VR process, including interest/vocational inventories. Refer this strategy to the Futures application package group.

- Inform consumers about the VR process and the full array of services

Great Falls: We continue to use weekly informational meetings to educate new customers about VR services and processes. We plan to use and modify existing public relations PowerPoint's for these presentations. This will allow all staff to provide a consistent message regarding the VR program.

- Develop more “natural support” for consumers requiring extended support.
- Train employers in how to accommodate, support, communicate, and supervise employees with brain disorders and other disabilities.
- Develop a three year public relations plan for each region targeting employers.
- Team up with private associations like NAMI to educate the public.
- Emphasize models and use of team case management; collaborate with other agencies, such as mental health case manager.
- Provide counselors training on models of team case management.